

EFFECTIVE FUNDRAISING:
Message Framing Techniques in Nonprofit Fundraising

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ABSTRACT

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Can nonprofit fundraising be more targeted and effective through the use of message framing techniques? Message frames are narrative lenses utilized by writers to present evidence in different ways to influence how an issue is most likely to be viewed by the reader. To test the effectiveness of three types of message frames, a randomized experimental study was conducted on roughly 6,500 participants through the Center for Child Protection's annual direct mail year-end fundraising appeal. The Center for Child Protection is an Austin nonprofit that helps children who have been victims of sexual and physical abuse through legal, medical, and therapeutic processes. The three message frames used for this study are informational, which educates the reader with core facts and statistics on the issue; personal, which provides a narrative story told with the aim of emotionally impacting the reader; and motivational, which focuses on the reader's ability to make a change and includes a direct call for action. The effectiveness of each frame was measured by numbers and monetary amounts of donations. Differences across message frames in their effectiveness are analyzed with several statistics, including logistic regression and linear regression. I find that the informational frame was the most effective message frame, in terms of producing the most responses and bringing in the highest monetary amount of donations. These results were suggestive of differences, but were not statistically significant. I suggest that this study be repeated multiple times to gather more data for further testing.

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INTRODUCTION

With over 1.4 million charitable organizations in America, and hundreds of billions of dollars donated each year to nonprofits, the nonprofit sector is approximately 5.4% of the national GDP, contributing over \$900 billion to the US economy (McKeever, 2015; Independent Sector, 2016). The role of fundraising in a nonprofit organization is incredibly important. With over two-thirds of American households making donations each year, each donor has a different reason for giving and choosing their organization (Independent Sector, 2016). Most fundraising messages, however, are all the same. They focus on pitching their mission statement and why they are important to the donor, and hope it is enough to convince the donor to choose that specific organization out of the other 1.4 million organizations. Fundraising can be more efficient and effective with the use of framing techniques.

As we can see from the charitable statistics above, fundraising and donating money is a surprisingly large part of the American culture. More than two-thirds of Americans donate to charity, which suggests that the majority of Americans receive some form of fundraising messaging, communication, or appeal each year (Independent Sector, 2016). Most of this fundraising communication most likely gets thrown away without being read or considered. This thesis aims to look at these pieces of fundraising communication and determine how the appeals can become not only more effective in raising money for the organizations sending them out, but also more interesting and engaging for those two-thirds of Americans to read.

Fundraising is a form of marketing and communication. Fundraisers are raising awareness about their organization through multiple communication channels, and spreading information through marketing and publicity. Compared to the research and study behind

effective forms of marketing and advertising, there is little comparative research aimed at fundraising. Fundraisers have typically operated on best practices, due to a lack of concrete scientific evidence. Fundraising best practices are strategies that have been proved effective over time through use at different organizations in different settings, rather than through scientific research. The reliance on these fundraising rules of thumb has led to a lack of scientific understanding of how to fundraise most effectively and efficiently. This thesis and research study aims to do just that, search for more effectiveness and efficiency in fundraising, and dive more deeply into the idea of targeted fundraising communication through the use of message framing techniques.

This thesis reviews existing research on the topic of message framing in communications, and other research on fundraising effectiveness. The main component of this thesis is a randomized, natural field experiment testing the effectiveness of message frames on charitable fundraising appeals. The message framing study was conducted with the Center for Child Protection, through their year-end, direct mail fundraising appeal. The effectiveness of each message frame is measured by numbers and monetary amounts of donations. Differences across message frames in their effectiveness are analyzed with several statistics, including logistic regression and linear regression, in addition to rates of response and average gift amounts. The study looks at the comparative effectiveness of three types of message framing techniques, in addition to a control. The key research goal is to determine whether there is a message frame that is most effective at bringing in donations. The thesis closes with a discussion of findings and limitations of the study, in addition to thoughts on the future of fundraising appeals and research that could be conducted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fundraising could be a science. Fundraising utilizes marketing and business strategies, and demographics data. Fundraising, however, is not treated like a science. There is good reason for this; fundraising is something that evolved out of philanthropy, and philanthropy is something that evolved from a need in the community. Philanthropy was not studied to determine the best way to create nonprofits or raise money, but rather developed based on need, when and wherever it was needed.

The evolution of philanthropy in the United States can be traced all the way back to Native American roots in the 1600s, when Native Americans came into contact with European settlers and continued their cultural tradition of sharing food and assistance. Over the next several hundred years, charity law was passed in the British-controlled colonies; the first estate gift was left to create Harvard University; Benjamin Franklin founded the Junto Club in Philadelphia and sparked civic engagement in the colonies (Burlingame, 2004). Numerous philanthropic organizations began to pop up all over colonized America: orphanages, religious orders, education agencies for African Americans, and higher education institutions. Public educational philanthropy began to develop with the opening of the Smithsonian Institute in 1846 and the Boston Symphony in 1881 (Burlingame, 2004). Many of the countries top institutions of higher education were all created through a philanthropic gift. By 1970, philanthropic giving in America had reached over \$21 billion. Just 30 years later in 2000, American philanthropic giving had reached a staggering \$212 billion a year (Burlingame, 2004). Fifteen years after that, Americans were donating \$373.25 billion to nonprofit organizations all over the world, from religion to health to education, and everything in between (O'Brien, 2016).

The field of fundraising has grown accordingly with the massive growth of the philanthropic industry. Large nonprofits, like institutions of higher education and health care, are now run like finely tuned machines. Employees are dedicated to each facet of fundraising, from prospect research, to regional fundraising, to gift processing, to direct mail, and many more, as described by Burlingame et al. (2016). Much of fundraising strategy, however, is still based off of best practices that have been proven effective over time. Obviously, with an industry bringing in over \$373.25 billion per year, the best practices are working (O'Brien, 2016). But there is always room for improvement. In recent years, more studies have been conducted on fundraising techniques to test for improvements to effectiveness. Fundraising raises money, but it also costs money to raise money. With more effective fundraising strategies, nonprofits can get a greater ROI for their fundraising, and consequently have more to spend on services to the community.

The reasoning behind why a donor decides to donate can have a large impact on fundraising strategies and techniques. Learning as much as possible about donor profiles and their motivation for giving is critical to targeting donors effectively, and presenting cases for support of an organization in the most effective way. Donors have a multitude of reasons for offering their money, time, and talent to a specific organization. Researchers have identified several basic reasons why people donate to charitable organizations: guilt, sympathy, empathy, and happiness (Aaker, & Akutsu, 2009). More studies have begun to pop up surrounding the topic of “donor identity,” which consists of the traits, characteristics, and goals a person develops throughout life, according to the Identity-Based Motivation model (IBM) (Oyserman, 2009). Oyserman (2009) argues that the use of specific identities, such as “donor” and “volunteer” resonate better than the broader identity of “giver” with nonprofit constituents.

It is also important to consider what identities associated with giving might be activated by the idea of donating. The three main associative identities are familial identity, community identity, and personal identity. As the descriptors suggest, familial identity ties into a familial experience with a certain organization or cause; community identity relates to social organizations and causes one is surrounded by in the community; and personal identity refers to a special connection you feel you have individually with that organization or cause (Oyserman, 2009). Aaker and Akutsu (2009) take the idea of identity a step further to question when giving to a cause impacts a person's identity, rather than the other way around. One potential explanation focuses on the "emotional antecedents of giving" (Aaker & Akutsu, 2009). This means giving to reduce a negative emotion, like guilt, versus giving to increase a positive emotion, like happiness.

The two most widely competing theories for why people donate to charitable organizations are self-interest versus altruism. The theory of self-interest giving supports the idea that donors are donating to organizations for selfish purposes, whether that be recognition, reciprocation, self-esteem issues, or for tax breaks. Andreoni (1990) argues three reasons behind self-interest giving. The first is the public good theory: people believe society, as a whole, will benefit from nonprofits, so they need to support them because they too will also benefit. The second is the exchange theory: donors give because of reciprocal rewards they will receive as thanks for their donation, whether that is a membership to the organization or a token of appreciation (Andreoni, 1990).

The third is the warm glow effect: people give because, psychologically and intangibly, they feel better about themselves for making the donation, creating a "warm glow" of positive emotions (Andreoni, 1990). Some researchers believe that all giving can be traced back to self-

interest, even giving that seems purely altruistic. Examples of gifts that one might consider “purely altruistic” are anonymous gifts and bequests; Simmons, however, believes even gifts like those could be traced back to an individual’s desire to be happier and feel good (Sargeant & Shang, 2010). Simmons (2010) believes it is important to admire donating regardless, as the underlying motives are not necessarily important. The involvement, support, and commitment of donors are what matters.

The techniques utilized in fundraising communication vary widely based on the organization, message, and channel of communication. Some researchers have tried to empirically study these techniques to measure effectiveness. One of the most prominent fundraising strategies is the use of matching grants in fundraising appeals. A study conducted by Karlan and List (2007) tested the impact of a matching grant on donor responses to a direct mail fundraising appeal. A matching gift is defined as a “gift that is a conditional commitment by a donor to match the contributions of others at a given rate, up to [a] maximum amount” (Karlan & List, 2007) the matching donor is prepared to give. The matching gift donor and the organization typically determine the rate.

Fundraising best practices, as Karlan and List (2007) found, tend to push the idea that “more is more;” the assumption has always been made that the higher the matching rate, the more likely people are to participate. This assumption does make sense; it seems obvious to think that people will donate more if they know their gift will be tripled instead of doubled because the gift will go so much further. Karlan and List (2007), however, found results that went slightly against conventional fundraising wisdom. The study found, in support of current fundraising practices, that including a matching grant in a fundraising appeal significantly increases the probability that a reader will donate and the amount donated per solicitation (Karlan & List,

2007). Going against current wisdom, they did not find any significant difference in donor response between a lower match ratio (i.e. \$1 donated by matching donor for every \$1 donated, or \$1: \$1) and a higher match ratio (i.e. \$3: \$1 and \$2: \$1) (Karlan & List, 2007). It is also important to note that this study on matching grants was conducted through a political organization. The impact of a matching grant could change, depending on the mission and type of the organization utilizing the match.

A newer area of study in the field of fundraising is the study of message framing techniques. Message framing describes how the content of a message is written. The term message framing specifically focuses on the evidence used within the writing to convey the writer's message, with the goal being prompting a specific response from the reader. Message framing could be thought as a tool for persuasive writing, as the frame aims to educate a reader with the hopes of getting them to think or act a certain way. Evidence in message frames could range from facts and statistics, to narratives, to emotion.

McEntire, Leiby, and Krain (2015) at the Lily Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis conducted a study on the effectiveness of message framing to shape perspectives and inspire action in the context of Human Rights Organizations (HROs). They utilized the three most common message frames used by HROs to draft material educating participants on the use of sleep deprivation as an interrogation technique. They found that the three message frames, informational, motivational, and personal, were more effective at consensus mobilization than at action mobilization (McEntire, Leiby, & Krain, 2015).

Consensus mobilization involves shaping an individual's perspectives on a subject in the shape of what one is trying to promote; in this case, an opinion against the use of sleep deprivation in interrogation. Action mobilization involves turning an opinion on a topic into an

action to help combat that topic. Action mobilization can happen through different channels, such as volunteering, donating, or spreading awareness through education. Most importantly, McEntire et al. (2015) found that the personal frame, which consisted of a narrative story, was the most effective at inspiring action mobilization. Only participants who received the personal message frame were more likely to sign a petition against the use of sleep deprivation.

The personal frame as effective in inspiring action is noted in examples of fundraising best practices. In Jeff Brooks' (2016) book, *The Fundraiser's Guide to Irresistible Communications*, he supports the use of personal narratives to create donor commitment. Brooks (2016) argues that story and narrative allow us to convey feelings and understanding that can strike a chord in a donor's heart. "Stories help us make sense of the world," Brooks (2016) writes. He argues in favor of narratives and against statistics, stating that facts can be mind boggling, but can often be so removed from the problem that we have a hard time relating. Brooks' (2016) gives several reasons for utilizing narratives in fundraising. The first is that a story is the account of one person; his theory is that one living thing does a better job to capture a reader's attention than a large vague problem. A story allows for conflict, and in the case of fundraising, a conflict in which the reader can be the hero. A key to a successful story is that the conflict is unresolved; the reader knows the story, but they do not know how it ends. This helps the reader see the need for help in resolving the story, allowing them to ultimately become the hero (Brooks, 2016).

In agreement with McEntire et al. (2015) and Brooks (2016), Kristof (2012) argues that fundraising needs to focus on hopeful stories of individual accounts. Focusing on an individual narrative, specifically one with triumph and hope, proves much more effective in raising money and opinion consensus. Writing from the perspective of fundraising strategies rather than a

scientific study, Kristof (2012) argues that “one death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic.” Slovic refers to this idea as “psychic numbing,” meaning that donors are turned off from supporting a cause after a message reaches a certain number of victims (Kristof, 2012). What seems to matter more to donors than saving a large number of people is saving a large proportion of people, which explains “psychic numbing.” Kristof (2012) and Brooks (2016) argue that donors have a hard time relating to a large group of people, feeling as though nothing they do will make an impact; on the other hand, an individual story or a very small group seems to donors like there is a much higher chance they will make an impact in the victims’ lives.

While Brooks (2016) and Kristof (2012) strongly support the use of narratives and the personal message frame, there are other message frames used by fundraisers that have also proved successful. The informational message frame was utilized in a direct mail fundraising experiment conducted by Karlan and Wood (2014). This study tested the impact of including information on the effectiveness of an organization’s programs in direct mail solicitations. The information that was added to the fundraising appeals consisted of scientific research that spoke to the effectiveness of Freedom for Hunger’s programs. They found that prior donors with large gift amounts were more likely than small prior donors to be positively impacted by the additional information, and donate again. The authors attributed this discovery, that an informational frame is more impactful to large prior donors, to the idea that large prior donors appreciate knowing the benefits their donations are having on the organization’s programs (Karlan & Wood, 2014). This was compared to the idea that informational frames are less impactful on small prior donors because they are more likely motivated to donate due to the “warm glow” emotional benefit they receive when giving (Andreoni, 1990). The reasoning behind large prior donors being more

responsive to information can be linked to altruism, and the idea of being driven by the impact they have on an organization.

Motivational message frames impact readers by explaining to them how they can have a direct impact on a problem they care about (Benford & Snow, 2000). McEntire et al. (2015) utilized a motivational frame as one of the treatment groups. Motivational frames have been shown to impact donor behavior the most consistently of the message frames because they mobilize people to act, through an affirmation of a reader's agency and efficacy (Gamson, 1992). Motivational message frames typically affirm to a reader that they can make a difference, how to make a difference, and that their involvement will have the impact they want it to have.

Based on the evidence found in previous experiments on message framing, I can draw several hypotheses. This study utilizes three message frames as the treatment groups.

H_{A1}: The informational message frame will be the least effective of the three treatment groups when compared to the control. This hypothesis is due to the lack of informational frame use in typical fundraising strategies.

H_{A2}: The informational message frame could also be the most effective compared to the control because this study is targeted at previous donors, which correlates to the findings of Karlan and Wood (2014).

H_B: The personal and motivational message frames will be more effective than the informational frame when compared to the control.

Research has also considered how frames are connected to tone, whether positive or negative. Brooks (2016) suggests that a positive tone is better, but Das, Kerkhof, and Kuiper (2008) found that the different tones were more effective based on the evidence they presented. Das et al. (2008) found that message framing, with the definition of "focusing on the positive

consequences of donating or the negative consequences of not donating,” impacts the perceived significance of an organization’s mission. It is important to note that the definition of message framing can vary across the research domain. For the purposes of this study, message framing refers to the evidence and style of writing used to convey an organization’s fundraising message. Das et al. (2008) use the term “message evidence” to describe the way educational information is presented in a fundraising message. Das et al. (2008) found that combining different message frames with message evidence yielded the highest impact on participants’ attitudes toward a charity and the charity’s message. The combinations of abstract, statistical evidence with a negative frame, and anecdotal, vivid evidence with a positive frame produced the highest perceived charity message importance (Das, Kerkhof, & Kuiper, 2008). It was also found that the inclusion of how donations were being used to further the charity’s mission, and the inclusion of how likely it was that the charity would reach their goal, yielded positive attitudes and higher donor participation.

Contradictory to Karlan and Wood (2014) and Das et al. (2008), Small et al. (2007) found that the personal message frame was the most effective at prompting donations, while the combination of personal and informational actually decreased donations. It was proved that participants responded more to stories of “identifiable victims,” as these stories are very impactful and cause us to act irrationally. One of the major findings of this study was that donations decreased when participants were presented with a combination of personal and informational frames. Small et al. (2007) found that the statistical information seemed to override the emotional feelings towards the personal frame, and caused less generosity in participants. Kristof (2012) backs up Small et al. (2007) through his support of hopeful, individually focused narrative frames.

The communication strategy of message framing is new to fundraising, but not new to other fields, specifically politics, health behavior promotion, and social movements. In the field of politics, message framing is defined as “the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Chong & Druckman, 2007). A message can be constructed from several different perspectives, all of which present the issue in a different light that impacts different values, depending on the frame with which it is presented. The effects of message framing are utilized frequently in political surveys. A survey question can have dramatically different results, depending on how the question is framed. Chong and Druckman (2007) explain that a message frame can impact a survey because different frames tap into an individual’s combination of positive and negative attitudes towards an issue. The more negative frame that a question is presented with, the more negative the attitudes that surface will be, and vice versa.

Politicians utilize message framing in their policies to persuade their constituents to think about certain issues along specific party lines. They do this by playing up certain aspects of policies they support that resonate with the constituents’ values. Chong and Druckman (2007), however, state that framing an issue around a specific value does not work in favor of every issue, when comparing based on support garnered. A frame might be appropriate in one context, but not in another. An example is the environmental frame used to regulate growth is successful in garnering support in local debates and elections, but not as successful on a national stage (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

Another field that typically utilizes message framing, and has conducted decades of research on message framing, is the field of health behavior promotion. The messaging used in trying to convince people to adopt healthy or reject unhealthy habits has been backed up by

research into which combinations of evidence and positive or negative tone resonate better with individuals participating in health intervention programs. Framing in the context of behavior promotion focuses on either the *positive* outcomes of adopting the behavior or the *negative* consequences of failing to adopt the behavior. Cesario et al. (2013) conducted an analysis of framing in behavior promotion. The conclusion was that positive outcomes were more influential in promoting healthy behaviors in people who did not currently practice the behavior, while negative consequences were more influential in preventing unhealthy behaviors in people who practiced the health behavior (Cesario, Corker, & Jelinek, 2013). As an example of this analysis, non-smokers are more likely to be deterred from smoking when presented with statistics about lung cancer prevalence in smokers; current smokers are more likely to be promoted to quit when presented with information on health benefits of not smoking, like increased energy and the decreased rate of cancer.

An analysis done by Allen et al. (2000) focused on the type of evidence utilized to convey the message: statistical or narrative. They concluded that a message utilizing no evidence was the least effective; messages that combined both statistical and narrative evidence were the most effective (Allen et al., 2000). Interestingly, Allen et al. (2000) found that statistical evidence alone was more impactful than narrative evidence alone. The analyses conducted by Cesario et al. (2013) and Allen et al. (2000) are congruent with several other studies mentioned here, including Das et al. (2008), and Karlan and Wood (2014). All these studies examined the tone and/or evidence utilized in message frames, finding that statistical evidence (i.e. an informational message frame) was more effective at prompting response, and that the tone (positive or negative) of evidence also impacted responses. Allen et al. (2000) contradicts Kristof (2012) and Small et al. (2007) on the topic of combining personal and informational message

frames, which shows how message framing can produce very different results depending on the field and reasoning behind the message framing.

Benford and Snow (2000) conducted a review of the use and impact of message frames in social movement dynamics. They found that collective action frames were utilized to judge events as meaningful, and organize experience. These frames centered on “action-oriented beliefs” and “meanings that inspire...campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford & Snow, 2000). Benford and Snow (2000) found there to be three main core framing tasks: diagnostic framing, which is typically referred to as the “injustice” frame and focuses on an individual story of victimization; prognostic framing, which focuses on potential solutions to a problem and how to carry out the plan of social activation; and motivational framing, which focuses on the reader’s agency and ability to make an impact, and reasoning behind why they should get involved in the social movement (Benford & Snow, 2000). The definitions of these frames utilized in social movements show the similarities between the fields of fundraising and social movements. Nonprofit fundraising and social movements are similar fields; each has an important cause they are trying to persuade donors to support, whether through monetary donations or social activism. Both fields address problems the community is facing, but they approach the solution to the problems from different angles.

The major difference in the three frames utilized most often in social movements and the three frames utilized in this study is the use of the prognostic frame. In a nonprofit, especially one like the Center for Child Protection, there is not always a solution plan that can be enacted through involvement. Raising awareness about an issue in the community will help to combat it, but the clients the Center works with need trained professionals in the fields of social work and law enforcement to enact the plan. Fundraising can, in a sense, be a form of social activism: an

individual takes a stand to monetarily support something they care about and want to fix in the community.

Although the content and message framing of a fundraising communication piece would be the most crucial aspect, there is more to a good fundraising appeal than just the content. Fundraising appeals need design choices like photos, font, and color, depending on the channel of communication. When it comes to direct marketing, which was employed in this study through a direct mail appeal, Holder (2008) argues for four main constructs of direct marketing. These constructs consist of continuity, interaction, targeting, and control (Holder, 2008). It is important to note that with the major advances of technology in the last several decades, direct marketing can now take shape through many channels. This thesis focuses on direct mail fundraising and marketing, but the constructs compiled by Holder (2008) should be kept in mind when devising direct marketing and fundraising campaigns for different channels, whether online or otherwise. The construct of continuity refers to the continuous relationship an organization must maintain with each constituent.

Direct response fundraising does not need to result in a donation from each and every donor, but rather the cultivation of a lifetime relationship with a donor. This lifetime relationship will provide great value to an organization by providing the basis for a successful direct response fundraising program. The idea of cultivating lifelong relationships with donors, relationships that are not always characterized by consistent donating, are very important to the core support of an organization. Committed donors can act as donation support, but also can bring in other groups to the organization and spread awareness about the organization's mission, effectively growing the support base.

The construct of interaction refers to the multitude of channels an organization has to reach donors through. This includes the mechanisms used within a piece of direct mail fundraising. The style of mail, the type of content, and other aspects create opportunities for engagement within the direct mail piece. The construct of targeting refers to the use of data on donor preferences and characteristics to personalize communication. Not every donor needs to receive the same communication at the same time. Collecting data on donor characteristics allows an organization to effectively target donors at the best time for giving. The final construct of control refers to an organization's ability to regulate specific aspects of their direct response fundraising programs depending on what they find to be most effective (Holder, 2008).

Fundraising campaigns are designed to maximize persuasive appeal, through the use of message framing, visual design, verbal text, and layout. Photos are often included in fundraising appeals, as they are an excellent way to attach a personal face to a cause. Burt and Strongman (2004) conducted a study to test donors' emotional responses to different images used in nonprofit marketing. The second part of the study measured emotional responses to different images used in fundraising communications and the donations they produced. They found that charities are typically using images that evoke positive emotions, and especially images with children. However, it was found that images that provoked extremely negative, and mildly negative, emotions produced higher donation amounts, higher average donations, and larger donations of time (Burt & Strongman, 2004). It is interesting to find that sad images of children that evoke negative emotions in readers led to the highest donations, when compared to the positive images of children.

THE CENTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION

As this study was conducted as a randomized, natural field experiment, there must be a willing nonprofit organization through which to conduct the study on a subset of their donor base. The Center for Child Protection was the participating organization. They allowed the message framing experiment to be conducted through the Center's annual year-end fundraising appeal. The Center for Child Protection agreed to participate in this study because of their interest in developing more effective targeted communications for their constituents. Note that the Center for Child Protection is also referred to in this experiment as the Center.

The Center for Child Protection is a nonprofit, 501(c)3 classified organization located in Austin, Texas, serving the surrounding area of Travis County. The Center is a nationally accredited children's advocacy center, which is an organization that works on behalf of child victims of all types of abuse. The Center is involved mainly in the investigation of crimes against children. The Center serves Travis County children who are suspected victims of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and for children who have witnessed a violent crime.

The Center is a child-friendly facility with a mission to make children feel comfortable to be themselves, so that they can safely and effectively deal with their trauma. A goal of the Center for Child Protection is to combine the multiple agencies that handle the investigations, and aftereffects, of crimes against children. Children come to the Center for recorded forensic interviews with specially trained forensic interviewers, post-trauma medical exams, and counseling and intervention during the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases. The Center serves a culturally and socioeconomically diverse Central Texas population; they provide all services to children and their protective caregivers at no charge, and in English and Spanish.

For more than 25 years, the Center has worked to reduce the trauma for Central Texas children during the investigation and prosecution of crimes against children. The Center's mission is to bring together multiple agencies so that children only have to tell their story once. The Center maintains partnerships with Child Protective Services, Travis County Law Enforcement, and doctors and nurses from Austin's Dell Children's Medical Center to ensure children are safe and taken care of throughout the investigation process and beyond. For more information on the Center for Child Protection, please visit www.centerforchildprotection.org.

Fundraising plays a very important role in the Center's ability to provide meaningful services to child abuse victims. According to the Center's 2014 Annual Report, the Center had an operating budget of just over \$3.9 million and 62% of those operating expenses were brought in through fundraising events and donations. The Center differentiates between fundraising events and donations. Fundraising events consists of events hosted by the Center for the purpose of raising money from the community, and third-party events hosted to benefit the Center. Donations consist of funds raised through general, mission-driven donations, either solicited or unsolicited, cash or in-kind. Fundraising activities brought in 40% of the funding sources for 2014. The Center hosts four major events each year, in addition to several small third-party events that have designated the Center for Child Protection as the beneficiary.

Donations brought in 22% of the funding sources for 2014. While a smaller percentage of funding sources than events, general donations are very important to the bottom-line of organizations like the Center for Child Protection. General, mission-driven donations help create a core base of unconditional support for the nonprofit. Events-based donors are more "fair-weather donors"; they are typically absent in their support of the nonprofit organization when events are absent. Events-based donations, however, can be easier to come by because they are

flashier and more exciting; compare that to a mission-driven gift in which the donor typically receives nothing for the donation, except for a thank-you note and the “warm glow”.

Mission-driven gifts are usually solicited through direct meetings between organizational representatives and donors, or through fundraising communications. For the Center, fundraising communications consist of twice-yearly appeals, plus other as-needed communications. They send one appeal out in the spring and another at year-end. In 2014, the Center spent 22% of their total operations budget on fundraising activities. This portion of the budget involves money used to put on fundraising events, and money used to create fundraising communication, typically direct mail. Costs associated with direct mail fundraising include postage, printing, supplies, and envelope stuffing.

In 2014, the Center spent about \$0.33 on fundraising activities for every dollar they raised, resulting in almost \$2.7 million raised for the 2013-2014 fiscal year. According to SupportingAdvancement.com (n.d.), the national average cost to raise a dollar ranges from \$0.20 to \$1.25, depending on the fundraising activity and solicitation method. This experiment can help increase efficiency and effectiveness of fundraising through more targeted communications. Targeted communications through message frames will hopefully lead to an increase in response and funds raised, in addition to a decrease in money spent to raise money.

METHODS & DATA

The purpose of this study was to determine if different types of message frames elicit different responses from donors to nonprofits organizations. Data analysis hopes to determine which message framing technique is most effective at creating a positive donor response and inspiring action in the form of a donation. This project focuses solely on studying the effect that the content of the fundraising letter has on the donors. The topic of effective fundraising is a very large one with many different angles and aspects, but this study focuses only on the content of the text within the direct mail appeal. With more resources and time, it would be possible to examine multiple aspects of effective fundraising, such as colors, font and font size, length, layout, photos, timing of mailing, and many more. To begin to gain insight into effective fundraising, content was chosen to gain a fundamental understanding of how people are affected by different message frames.

Message framing classifies the type of writing and evidence used by a writer to persuade the audience. The three message framing techniques that this study focuses on are informational, personal, and motivational. Each frame focuses on a specific type of evidence utilized to educate and influence the reader in a certain way. For the purposes of this study, a donor refers to someone who has ever engaged with the Center through the gift of a monetary donation. In this section, the details of how those groups of donors were selected to be included in the study group will be explained. For the purposes of this study, a monetary response to the appeal is classified as a donation to the Center.

This study was designed as a randomized, natural field experiment. As defined by Harrison and List (2004), a natural field experiment is one that employs a nonstandard subject

pool (i.e. not students), an abstract framing, and an imposed set of rules, in a field that allows for an environment in which the subjects naturally undertake tasks of the experiment, and most crucially, where the subjects do not know they are part of an experiment. In a natural field experiment, the field is a normal environment, and the participants would expect the actions to occur in a non-study environment. The natural field experiment design allows us to use a direct mail fundraising appeal as a study mechanism because participants would normally receive a fundraising appeal while not participating in a study.

One of the most important aspects of a natural field experiment is that the participants do not know they are participating in a study because they would expect the actions to occur in a non-study environment. The donors participating must believe that the fundraising letter they receive is the Center's typical annual year-end appeal. If participating donors knew the letter they received was part of a study, their decision to respond (or not respond) with a donation would be biased, leading to skewed and unusable data. This study is randomized because the sorting of participants into treatment groups was done randomly, ensuring a lack of bias based on the treatment group selections.

The study was conducted with the Center for Child Protection, through their annual year-end direct mail fundraising appeal. Direct mail fundraising refers to "snail mail." Fundraising is often more increasingly done online through email and websites thanks to the advent of new technology. A fundraising appeal, defined in terms of direct mail, is a greeting card-type mail piece consisting of organizational content (content aimed at educating the donor about the organization in some way) and an ask for donations. The communication channel of year-end direct mail was chosen for this study because it is something the Center's donor-base expects to

receive on yearly basis. The year-end appeal is also typically sent to a large enough audience to constitute a realistic sample size.

The participant list criterion was chosen in consensus with help from the Center's staff. Criteria from previous year-end appeal mailings were used to make decisions on the participant list (also referred to as the mailing list). The list consisted of the following groups of individuals: an "active" group and an "inactive" group. It is important to note that these two groups were pulled based on the following criteria, and they are not groups that can be utilized for data analysis because of a lack of coding in the Center's database. The "active" group consisted of people who fell into these categories in the timeframe of 2013 to fall 2016: Center Friend Visits (a personal tour of the Center and meeting with staff); event attendees; donors added to the database since 2013; donors who made a gift between 2013 to 2016; volunteers over the last three years; or Friends of the Center, Board members, Guild members, and Guardian Angel members.

The "inactive" group consisted of people who fell into these categories in the timeframe of 2010 to 2012: made a gift between 2010 to 2012; their last gift was of \$101 or more; or they have a giving history length of three or more years. Donors who made a gift after October 2016 were excluded from the study pool because this is when the final participant list was created. The total list came to 6,569 participants. Participants were randomly divided into four groups, and then randomly assigned to either the control or one of the three treatment groups. Each treatment group received a different message framing technique. The direct mail appeals were mailed out to each group depending on the random assignment. After two months of data collection, the study was closed to further responses. Some responses may have been received after the end of data collection, but they were not included in data analysis.

TREATMENT GROUPS

The treatment group message frames chosen were informational, personal, and motivational. A control group was also utilized. A staff member at the Center wrote the control letter because that will allow the control to be as similar as possible to an appeal the Center would typically send out. The staff member who writes the annual year-end appeal letters for the Center drafted the control letter. To determine the typical writing style and design of the Center's appeal cards, ten past appeal cards were examined to develop the voice and style of the cards. Since the study was a natural field experiment and participants did not know they were

FIGURE 1: Message content for control letter.

The Center for Child Protection's primary service is the forensic interview and while this is a vital part of helping child victims heal, many children and their protective caregivers continue to return to the Center for additional services through our clinical program.

The journey of healing from the trauma of abuse can be difficult, and often times, children need extra support and guidance. Many children have been so traumatized they require years of therapy, and it's not uncommon for new issues to arise when they reach various stages of their life. Because of you, the Center is here for those families.

These families are returning and participating in unique therapy methods. This year, the therapy team trained in a model of therapy called Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT). This model ensures that each child's trauma and brain development levels are evaluated and an individualized plan is put in place to help them move forward. Therapy strategies may include standard talk therapy or methods that focus on basic movements that enhances a child's interaction levels, including dance, yoga, music, gardening and more.

The Center is developing its therapy services in a special way. It's growth that comes with immense responsibility, and the Center is more than ready to take on the next step of ending the cycle of child abuse. Please consider making a gift to the Center for Child Protection to continue helping Travis County's most vulnerable children through the healing process. Thank you for your support and your passion to end this epidemic.

participating in a study, it was important to maintain a level of quality and uniformity with what the Center usually sends out. However, the purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of message frames, so the uniform style does stray in terms of content and writing. Please see FIGURE 1 for the control message content.

Using techniques touched on in the literature review, exemplar studies as base points, and recommendations for writing style from author Jeff Brooks (2016), I drafted three letters, each written with a different message frame. The first message frame is “informational.” The informational message frame’s purpose is to educate the reader with core facts and statistics, focusing on what the organization does. This frame utilizes educational and statistical information to tell the reader about the issue at hand, which is child abuse in this study. The goal of all four messages is to persuade participants to donate to the Center. The informational aspect of this message frame focuses on facts and statistics about child abuse in Central Texas. The statistical information was gathered from the Center for Child Protection’s 2014 annual report, put together by the Marketing Team. In previous research, the informational frame has shown to be less effective at inspiring action or issue consensus (McEntire, Leiby, & Krain, 2015). Previous studies show that participants are persuaded more by narrative than facts, and that the positive or negative tone of the information given affects participants differently depending on their connection to the topic of the information (Das, Kerkhof, & Kuiper, 2008). Please see FIGURE 2 for the informational message frame content.

FIGURE 2: Message framing content for informational letter.

We believe children should be safe in our communities. In 2015, there were **66,721** confirmed child abuse cases in Texas. In that same year, the Center for Child Protection reviewed **14,758** Travis County child abuse reports from the Texas Child Abuse Hotline. Unfortunately, many cases go **unreported and unknown**, even to family members. But you can help by becoming a child advocate and donating to the Center to help change these victims' lives.

The Center's Child Protection Team works tirelessly to keep our children and our community safe. In 2015, **1,025** children received forensic interviews that allowed them to share their story in a safe and friendly environment at the Center. Of these children, **88%** knew their offender and **63%** were victims of suspected sexual abuse.

The Center's vision for change is to work every day to end the cycle of child abuse through **advocacy, education and community involvement**. Our community has put in **10,866** hours of volunteering to help fight for Travis County victims and their families. Help us to continue to support these children through a donation of any size.

The second message frame is “personal.” The personal message frame’s purpose is to present a narrative told with the aim of emotionally impacting the reader, focusing on an individual story. This frame utilizes impact narratives with details, depth, characters, and voice to educate the reader about the issue at hand. The narrative of this frame focuses on a deeply personal story about a former client at the Center and her struggle through the prosecution process of a child abuse case. The narrative was supplied from the

FIGURE 3: Message framing content for personal letter.

*Eleven-year-old Jane** had to testify against her abuser in court.

After a family friend began sexually abusing her, simple tasks like attending school and going to the doctor filled Jane with dread. Once a carefree and fun-loving girl, Jane became crippled with anxiety. Every-day life was so distressing that she even considered suicide. And now, she had to stand in front of a group of strangers and her abuser, and discuss those horrible, painful memories.

Jane went to court with an **army of support**—her Family Advocate from the Center for Child Protection and her parents were right by her side. But they weren't enough. Jane's first time on the stand was painful and terrifying. After cross-examination, a shaken, tearful Jane ran to the Family Advocate saying she couldn't do it anymore, begging to go home. Unfortunately, the trial was far from over.

Jane's parents couldn't bear to see their daughter relive her pain. The Family Advocate suggested bringing Sidney, the Center's Pet Therapy Dog, to court with Jane the next day. When Sidney arrived at the courthouse, Jane knelt down nervously to pet the Golden Retriever. Jane's parents watched her anxiety lower as she stroked Sidney's fluffy ears. She smiled for the first time since the trial began.

During another difficult cross-examination, Sidney placed her head in Jane's lap to remind her that she was there for her **no matter what**. The simple gesture provided the **strength** Jane needed to **keep going**. Through the difficult testimony, Sidney provided the **kindness, comfort, and courage** that Jane so desperately needed.

**Names and other identifying circumstances have been changed to protect the privacy of children and families.*

Center staff. In previous research, the narrative or personal frame has fared better than the informational in terms of eliciting positive responses because study participants are more able to identify with and feel sympathy towards the characters in the narrative (McEntire, Leiby, & Krain, 2015; Das, Kerkhof, & Kuiper, 2008). This personal connection resonates with participants and seems to have more meaning and affect on their opinion than plain statistics. Please see FIGURE 3 for the personal message frame content.

The third message frame is “motivational,” and focuses on the reader. The motivational message frame’s purpose is to emphasize a reader’s agency, inspiring them with their own motivation and a direct call to action. This frame utilizes motivational writing that helps boost the donors “warm glow” effect by highlighting their good deeds and the impact they have had on the organization and cause. The content of the motivational frame almost over-utilizes the word “you:” research shows that donors are more likely to respond positively when they are made to feel like they are doing something good, and that their collective impact will make a difference because of them as individuals (Brooks, 2016). Jeff Brooks (2016) writes about making

FIGURE 4: Message framing content for motivational letter.

Our community is the heart of the Center for Child Protection. People like you help the Center work toward ending the cycle of child abuse and comforting victims through their trauma. In 2015, we hit some major milestones and it could not have happened without you.

Because of you, more than **1,000** Travis County children were given an opportunity to tell their story in a safe, friendly environment.

Because of you, more than **250** family members were given the skills to know how to be protective caregivers.

Because of you, more than **5,000** community members were taught how to detect, prevent, and report abuse.

We all have one goal: to **end** the cycle of child abuse. And we won’t **stop** until we reach it. We hope you’re with us for the **fight**. Whether you fight child abuse by donating, volunteering, attending events, or raising awareness, every moment and **every person matters**. You have the opportunity to make an even **bigger difference** in the lives of these children and **create a brighter tomorrow**.

fundraising appeals “all about the donor.” Brooks (2016) writes that donors need to know that what the organization is doing would not be possible without them; they have an opportunity to make a difference and it all starts with them. The statistics used in the motivational frame were gathered from the Center for Child Protection’s 2014 annual report, put together by the Marketing Team.

As there is not as much research on the use of the motivational frame, it is unclear how the motivational frame will perform in comparison to the control. As mentioned previously, donors are more likely to act when they are made to feel like an integral part of something good. Therefore, the motivational frame taps into a donor’s motivation and typically resonates more than the informational frame (McEntire, Leiby, & Krain, 2015). Please see FIGURE 4 for the motivational message frame content.

APPEAL LETTER DESIGN

The design of the letters was created in collaboration with the Center’s marketing and communications team. Each of the four letters is exactly the same except for the messaging content. The front covers, back covers, and ask pages are identical in all four letters. The ask page was written after examining multiple ask cards and appeals created over the past ten years by the Center. The ask page consists of a soft ask for support of the organization, and then a bulleted list of ways to donate. The list gives examples of donation amounts and what they will do for the Center and the children they serve. All data and examples were gathered from Center staff members. The blue background for the ask page was chosen to help differentiate between

the message framing content side (inside left) and the ask page (inside right). This differentiation was needed to divide up the text and put more emphasis on each side individually, rather than blending the messaging and the ask page into one large block of information. Please see FIGURES 5, 6, and 7 for the front cover, back cover, and ask page utilized in all four appeal letters. Other textual design techniques such as font size and type, color, and emphasis were chosen based on recommendations from Jeff Brooks (2016). His research has shown that large size serif fonts are easier to read in print, black font is the most appealing to readers, and that techniques such as bold text draw the reader's attention to certain aspects.

FIGURE 5: Front cover – identical on all four letters.



FIGURE 6: Back cover – identical on all four letters.



Brooks (2016) explains that readers typically do not read a letter from the top down, but rather bounce around the text, reading what their eyes land on first. This is why text techniques that emphasize certain parts of the letters are important because they cause readers to pay attention. The back cover is the stock used on all Center branding and marketing pieces.

The cover of the letter is typical of a Center marketing piece. A previously unused stock photo was chosen from a wide array; the Center for Child Protection cannot use real photos of their clients for confidentiality purposes. The goal of the cover photo was to generate sympathy but also portray hope for the child, in the eyes of the reader. Research has shown that photos of

children that elicit negative emotions in readers tend to result in higher, and more, donations (Burt & Strongman, 2004). The simple cover with the photo and the Center logo was chosen because it allows all four letters to be uniform, while still conveying the ultimate message of asking for support.

FIGURE 7: Ask page – identical on all four letters.

Please consider making a gift to the Center for Child Protection and Travis County child abuse victims. Every donation, big or small, matters. Thank you for your support, your passion and your desire to help the most vulnerable children in our community.

Help us continue to support these children through a donation of any size.

\$25 provides two children with teddy bears and nutritious snacks after their forensic interview.

\$50 celebrates one child's birthday with birthday decorations, supplies and gifts.

\$100 provides five children with new clothes from our Kid's Closet.

\$225 provides one therapy session for a recovering child.

\$500 gives one struggling family a very happy holiday season.

\$1,250 provides two weeks of psychiatric services for all of our children.

P.S. Your year-end, **tax-deductible gift** will help **deserving child abuse victims** right here in our Austin community. These children **need** your support today!

DATA COLLECTION

The letters were mailed out to the participant list the first week of December 2016. The control was sent to 1,642 participants and the treatment groups were sent to 4,927 participants total (personal: 1,643; motivational: 1,642; informational: 1,642). Each piece of direct mail sent out consisted of a plain white envelope with the Center logo that included the following: the fundraising appeal (dependent upon the study group assigned to the participant), a response card and reply envelope (the mechanisms for donors to respond with a donation via mail). In addition to donating via mail, donors also had the options of calling to donate and donating online.

All donors who received the mailing, meaning they were on the study participant list, were flagged in the database as participating in the study. When a donor responded to the study with a donation, the study group they were a part of was added to their database profile. Once data collection ended two months after sending out the direct mail, all donors who responded were aggregated into a list and data from their profiles was analyzed. The first set of data utilized was on the gift they gave in response to this study, and included the gift amount, the gift date, and the study group they were in. The second set of data utilized was on each donor's giving history to the Center. This set included their average gift amount, total number of gifts, second to last gift date/amount/purpose, and general notes on the giving history of each respondent. Data on the number of respondents who had previously volunteered at or attended a Center event was also analyzed.

RESULTS

A small number of participants contributed (55 people responded in total), which is in line with the typical, although low, response rate of direct mail fundraising appeals at around 1%. In fact, when compared to the Center’s previous direct mail fundraising appeals, this study was in the top four most successful appeals the Center has sent out since 2000. As shown in Table 1, seventeen appeals from 2000 to 2016 were compared on the basis of number of gifts received, total monetary amount raised, and average gift amount of the gifts received.

Table 1: Previous Fundraising Appeal Overall Data				
Year End Appeal Year	Number of Gifts	Total Gift Amounts	Average Gift Amount	Response Rate
2000 Year End	30	\$9,210.00	\$307.00	Unavailable
2002 Year End	43	\$7,890.00	\$183.49	Unavailable
2003 Year End	43	\$8,015.00	\$186.40	Unavailable
2004 Year End	55	\$10,935.00	\$198.82	Unavailable
2005 Year End	60	\$6,030.00	\$100.50	Unavailable
2007 Year End	55	\$6,071.00	\$110.38	Unavailable
2008 Year End	8	\$1,475.00	\$184.38	Unavailable
2009 Year End	53	\$8,300.00	\$156.60	Unavailable
2011 Year End	38	\$5,666.00	\$149.11	Unavailable
2012 Year End	42	\$7,690.00	\$183.10	Unavailable
2013 Year End	6	\$3,375.00	\$562.20	Unavailable
2014 Year End	45	\$10,625.00	\$236.11	0.64%
2016 Year End	55	\$13,350.00	\$242.73	0.84%
Spring Appeal Year	Number of Gifts	Total Gift Amounts	Average Gift Amount	Response Rate
2010 Spring	31	\$3,190.00	\$102.90	Unavailable
2011 Spring	37	\$5,095.00	\$137.70	Unavailable
2013 Spring	34	\$4,950.00	\$145.59	Unavailable
2015 Spring	23	\$1,367.63	\$59.46	0.33%

The 2016 Study Appeal received the second highest number of gifts out of the seventeen appeals, coming in second under the 60 gifts that the 2005 Year End appeal received. This study brought in the highest monetary amount, topping the chart at \$12,950.00 total in donations. This study had the fourth highest average gift at \$235.45; the 2013 Year End appeal had the highest average gift of \$562.20, due to a total of six gifts bringing in \$3,375.00. Unfortunately, this is all the data available to me on these previous appeals; I cannot speculate as to why some years were more successful than others. This comparison of previous appeals does suggest that the message framing appeals as part of this study were more successful in bringing in donations than the large majority of previous appeals.

Table 2 presents summary statistics and provides the core experimental results. In the table, typical fundraising measures such as response rate, dollars raised for every one dollar spent, and average gift amount are detailed. As Table 2, Panel A indicates, there were a total of 55 donors, out of 6,569 participants, which yields a response rate of 0.84%. The appeal brought in \$12,950.00 in donations, which comes out to an average gift amount of \$235.45. The study yielded a rate of \$0.31 spent for each \$1.00 raised. All donations were \$1,000 and under, except for one outlier of \$4,000. All data analysis has been conducted with and without the \$4,000 donation; the table detailing results without the outlier can be found in Appendix A. It is important to note that the outlier could change the results of this study. Some of the results are driven by the outlier, which suggests that the data can be sensitive to one donor.

For reference, we will start with the control group analysis. The control group had 12 responses, yielding a 0.73% response rate with 1,642 participants. A total of \$2,525.00 was donated from control group participants, producing an average gift size of \$210.42. The control group produced a rate of \$0.39 spent for each \$1.00 raised, slightly higher than the overall. I also

looked at the history of donor responses, finding the average gift amounts for previous donations and comparing that to the gift amounts received in the study, through calculation of the average percent change. This summary statistic provides information about a change in average giving habits based on treatment group. The control group had an average percent change from average gift amount to study gift of 12.36%. This means that, on average, the gifts sent in response to the control group were 12.36% higher than those donors' average gift amounts given in the past.

Table 2: Response and Donation Data (Panel A)			
	Overall	Control	Treatment
Number of Responses (i.e. a donation)	55	12	43
Response Rate	0.84%	0.73%	0.87%
Dollars Given	\$12,950.00	\$2,525.00	\$10,425.00
Dollars Spent for Every \$1 Raised	\$0.31	\$0.39	\$0.29
Observations	6569	1642	4927
Average Gift Amount	\$235.45	\$210.42	\$242.44
Average Percent Change from Average Previous Gift Amount to Study Gift	-2.74%	12.36%	-7.77%
(Panel B)	Message Frame		
	Personal	Motivational	Informational
Number of Responses (i.e. a donation)	9	16	18
Response Rate	0.55%	0.97%	1.10%
Dollars Given	\$2,575.00	\$1,500.00	\$6,350.00
Dollars Spent for Every \$1 Raised	\$0.39	\$0.66	\$0.16
Observations	1643	1642	1642
Average Gift Amount	\$286.11	\$93.75	\$352.78
Average Percent Change from Average Previous Gift Amount to Study Gift	1.26%	-13.57%	-11.00%

The overall treatment received 43 responses, yielding a 0.87% response rate. This is higher than the response rate for the control group by over 0.1%, showing that the treatment groups prompted more responses than the control. A total of \$10,425.00 was donated in the treatment groups, with an overall average gift amount of \$242.44.

The average percent change for the treatment groups was -7.77%, meaning that the study gifts received from donors in the treatment groups were actually 7.77% lower than those donors' average gift amounts given in the past. This is surprising, as the treatments were expected to perform better and produce larger gifts than the previous appeals. However, as we can see in previous discussion and in Table 1, the study appeal did fare well comparatively to previous appeals. The lower average gift amounts could be attributed to randomization or to the donor groups chosen to participate in this study.

To test for significance, a logistic regression and a linear regression were run on the binary data. The difference between the treatment and control groups is not statistically significant; as this study was only conducted once with a small amount of data, it needs to be conducted multiple times by an organization. Please see Appendix B for statistical analysis tables.

The treatment group comprised of three different conditions to which we will now turn. We will start with the personal message frame data. The personal message frame had a total of 9 responses. This yielded a 0.55% response rate, and a total donation amount of \$2,575.00. With an average gift amount of \$286.11, the personal message frame had the second highest average gift amount. Within the treatment groups, the personal frame had the highest average percent change in previous average gift amount to study gift amount at 1.26%. Compared to the control, the personal frame's response rate of 0.55% was almost 0.20% lower than the control's response rate. The high average gift amount and the increase in average percent change of gift amounts could be attributed to sensitivity to small changes in the data.

While the personal frame had the lowest amount of responses, it produced the second highest average gift amount. These findings could show that the personal message frame appeal

was an impactful frame to the donors that received it and chose to respond because they responded with such high average gifts. This high average gift could show that the personal message frame inspires passionate donors to give. However, the low response rate could signal that donors have a hard time connecting with the personal message frame, potentially because it is an issue that does not relate to them or it is too emotional.

The motivational message frame inspired 16 donors to respond with a donation, with gifts on average \$93.75, and gifts totaling \$1,500.00. The motivational frame had a response rate of 0.97%, higher than both the control and personal groups, but lower than the informational group. Because of the low average gift amount, the motivational frame raised \$0.91 for every letter sent out, the lowest when compared to the control. The motivational frame had an average change from the average gift amount for each donor to the amount of their most recent gift of -13.57%, meaning that on average, the gifts sent in response to the motivational group were 13.57% lower than the donors' average gift amounts given in the past. The low average gift amount combined with high response rate suggests that the motivational message frame is fulfilling its goal: to motivate donors to make a difference, regardless of the size of the gift. The motivational message frame tries to get across the message that every donor is important and has the agency to make an impact. The goal of the motivational frame combined with the low average gift, high response rate shows that the motivational frame may be a successful frame at persuading readers to its intended purpose.

The informational message frame inspired 18 donors to respond with a donation, with an average gift of \$352.78, and gifts totaling \$6,350.00. With the most respondents, the informational frame had the highest response rate at 1.10% when compared to the control's response rate of 0.73%. This is an interesting find; research in the fundraising domain states that

donors do not prefer informational frames because facts and statistics can be hard to relate to on a level that inspires donation (Brooks, 2016). One reason behind the effectiveness of the informational frame in this study could be attributed to the fact that the Center's typical fundraising appeal tends to resemble an informational frame the most, so constituents could be most accustomed to the style of the informational frame.

The informational frame raised \$3.87 for every letter sent out, and had an average change from the average gift amount for previous gifts to the amount of the most recent gift of -11.00%. This was the lowest average gift amount change of the treatment groups when compared to the control. The highest number of responses and the highest average gift amount suggests that the informational frame is the most effective message frame tested in this study. It inspired the most donors to donate the largest amount of money, proving most effective. As mentioned previously, this does not correlate with typical fundraising strategy, but does relate to Karlan and Wood's (2014) findings on informational frames and previous donors to an organization. This will be examined in the discussion section.

There are multiple potential reasons why the results of this study are not statistically significant. While the data shows insignificance, that could be attributed to true insignificant data, a lack of power, or the product of a "rare event." Fundraising appeals typically have low response rates, which produce rare events with small amounts of collectable data. This is a common problem in fundraising direct marketing, which complicates the research process. We do not know if the study failed to find significance, or if the insignificant results are due to competing factors. I suggest that we continue this study over several years to pool data and collect more responses. This study serves as an experimental design for additional studies on fundraising strategy effectiveness, and more research in this area is needed.

DISCUSSION

The strategy behind fundraising communication and appeals consists of many facets, ranging from layout to ask amounts to message content and more. This study aimed to test the impact of three types of message frames on donor responses through donations to a year-end direct mail fundraising appeal. Conducted as a randomized natural field experiment, this study took place in a natural environment for all the participants. They were not aware they were participating in a study, and participants were randomly assigned to treatment groups.

In particular, this study explored the effect that three different message frames can have on donor response to a fundraising appeal. Using an informational frame, a personal frame, and a motivational frame as the three treatment groups, four letters (treatment groups plus a control) were drafted. Each letter served the same purpose: educate donors about the mission of the Center for Child Protection and how they can make a difference. However, each letter framed that message in a different way, depending on the frame assigned. The informational frame employed facts and statistics to educate the reader; the personal frame employed a narrative account of a victim who had been helped by the Center to produce an emotional response in the reader; and the motivational frame employed language that tapped into the reader's agency to show them how they could make a difference, no matter how small. The control was written by a Center staff member to maintain uniformity with previous Center-produced appeals.

A logistic regression and a linear regression show that the data is not statistically significant. However, this could be attributed to true insignificant data, a lack of power, or the product of a "rare event." Fundraising appeals typically have low response rates, which produce rare events with small amounts of collectable data. There may be substantial bias in the results

because of the possibility of a rare event. We do not know if the study failed to find significance, or if the insignificant results are due to competing factors.

We find that utilizing a message frame does increase donor response and revenue when compared to the control, and previous non-framed appeals. We see more response and donations from the motivational and informational frames compared to the control, with the personal frame bringing in the least responses. We find that a personal message frame, while it does not necessarily lead to more donors, could help cultivate more passionate and committed donors. This is seen through the high average gift amount produced by the personal frame, despite receiving the fewest responses compared to the control.

We find that the motivational frame produces more donors who give smaller gifts. This is important because it suggests that the motivational frame is doing its job of convincing all types of donors that they can make a difference. This motivational frame is important because it can help bring in donors of all levels, and make them feel important, which can lead to a stronger and more committed donor base at all levels. We find that the informational message frame brings in the largest amount of donors, and the highest average gift size. This can potentially be explained, within this study, through the examination of the Center's previous direct mail appeals. They tend to have more of an informational focus, so donors may be accustomed to the informational frame, and thus more willing to donate.

When relating these results back to previous research, we are brought to the conclusion that the informational message frame was the most effective message frame. The informational appeal had the highest number of responses, the highest response rate, brought in the largest monetary amount of gifts, and had the highest average gift amount by over \$50.00. This finding of informational frame effectiveness is surprising, as it disagrees with previous studies and

fundraising strategies. McEntire et al. (2015) found that the personal message frame, when compared to informational, motivational, and no message, was the most effective at inspiring donor consensus with the mission of a Human Rights Organization. They found that the study participants felt more educated after reading the informational frame, but not more inspired to support the organization and raise awareness. Jeff Brooks (2016) writes about the benefits of utilizing a personal message frame over informational because an emotional narrative helps the reader connect more deeply to the issue. A personal story seems like it would be more impactful and relatable than the facts and statistics used in an informational frame.

These findings of informational frame effectiveness, while they do not match up with all of fundraising's best-practice strategies, do relate to a study conducted by Karlan and Wood (2014). They found that prior donors with large gift amounts to a specific organization were more likely to be positively impacted by an informational-framed message, and donate again, than small prior donors. Karlan and Wood (2014) attributed this discovery that an informational frame is more impactful to large prior donors, to the idea that large prior donors appreciate knowing the benefits their donations are having on the organization's programs. This was compared to the idea that informational frames are less impactful on small prior donors because they are more likely motivated to donate due to the "warm glow" emotional benefit they receive when giving (Andreoni, 1990). The reasoning behind large prior donors being more responsive to information can be linked to altruism, and the idea of being driven by the impact they have on an organization. The findings of Karlan and Wood (2014) and this study show that informational frames have a larger effect on prior donors to an organization. This study was conducted only on prior donors to the Center for Child Protection, so it can be concluded that the Karlan and Wood (2014) data holds true in informational frames being effective on prior donors.

After the study concluded, I sat down with staff from the Center for Child Protection to learn their thoughts on the study results. The Center learned to put better and stronger strategy behind their annual fundraising appeals. In order to better engage donors and find better results, the Center plans to approach these projects more purposefully. They are also looking forward to using the next few years as continued research: utilizing effective message framing learned through the study, but also experimenting with different design techniques, segmenting donors, more purposefully targeting communication, and a variety of other techniques. The Center plans to implement the results across different methods of communication. They are hoping to start more email messaging to constituents and will utilize these results to craft those messages.

The data and results suggest that more research is needed on the concept of fundraising message framing. Further research into each specific frame can help us identify why the personal frame inspires larger donations, while the motivational frame inspires more donors to donate. It is also important to consider these message frames in the context of other nonprofit organizations. This study was conducted with the Center for Child Protection, a children's advocacy center that helps children who have been sexually and physically abused through the investigation and recovery processes of their trauma. However, there are millions of nonprofit organizations in America that serve a multitude of populations and causes. We need to remember that certain frames, like the informational frame in this study, might be the most effective in the context of one organization; a different cause and target population could produce different results based on the message frames. The goal of producing more effective fundraising is a goal all nonprofit organizations can share. As the need for services increases, so does the desire to do good, and we can streamline that process through determining the most effective fundraising strategies.

APPENDIX A

Table 1: Response and Donation Data (Panel A)			
<i>*all data presented without \$4,000 outlier</i>	Overall	Control	Treatment
Number of Responses (i.e. a donation)	54	12	42
Response Rate	0.82%	0.73%	0.85%
Dollars Given	\$8,950.00	\$2,525.00	\$6,425.00
Dollars Spent for Every \$1 Raised	\$1.36	\$1.54	\$1.30
Observations	6568	1642	4926
Average Gift Amount	\$165.74	\$210.42	\$152.98
Average Percent Change from Average Previous Gift Amount to Study Gift	-4.02%	12.36%	-9.48%
(Panel B)	Message Frame		
	Personal	Motivational	Informational
Number of Responses (i.e. a donation)	9	16	17
Response Rate	0.55%	0.97%	1.04%
Dollars Given	\$2,575.00	\$1,500.00	\$2,350.00
Dollars Spent for Every \$1 Raised	\$1.57	\$0.91	\$1.43
Observations	1643	1642	1641
Average Gift Amount	\$286.11	\$93.75	\$138.24
Average Percent Change from Average Previous Gift Amount to Study Gift	1.26%	-13.57%	-16.14%

APPENDIX B

Table 2: Statistical Analysis				
Linear Regression Models				
<i>Amount Given and Treatment</i>	Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	1.5278	1.3741	1.119	0.263
Treatment Groups	0.5781	1.5866	0.364	0.716
<i>Amount Given and Treatment (w/out \$4,000 outlier)</i>	Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	210.42	67.84	3.102	0.00311
Treatment Groups	-57.44	76.93	-0.747	0.45861
<i>Amount Given and Letters (w/out \$4,000 outlier)</i>	Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	210.42	66.49	3.165	0.00264
Informational	-72.18	86.85	-0.831	0.40984
Motivational	-116.67	87.96	-1.326	0.19075
Personal	75.69	101.57	0.745	0.45961
Logistic Regression Models				
	Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	-4.9114	0.2897	-16.953	<2e-16
Treatment Groups	0.1789	0.3277	0.546	0.585
Informational	0.4092	0.3743	1.093	0.274
Motivational	0.2901	0.3835	0.757	0.449
Personal	-0.2901	0.4423	-0.656	0.512

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BIOGRAPHY

Emily Koch was born in Houston, Texas on August 3, 1995 and lived with her family until moving to Austin in 2013. She attended the University of Texas at Austin, receiving her Bachelor of Arts in Plan II Honors in 2017. She is also receiving a Public Health Graduate Certificate from the UTHealth School of Public Health. While at the University of Texas, Ms. Koch was a member of Kappa Delta Sorority, serving as the Vice President of Membership. She also interned at the Center for Child Protection, the University of Texas Development Office and MD Anderson Cancer Center. All of these internship positions were in the field of fundraising, and Ms. Koch gained experience working with events, planned giving, stewardship, and major gifts. Ms. Koch will return to MD Anderson Cancer Center this summer to work on the writing team in the Development Office.